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4. *A Letter of General James Wilkinson, 1806.*

IN his work, *The Aaron Burr Conspiracy*, Dr. W. F. McCaleb quotes a letter from José de Iturrigaray, the viceroy of Mexico, to Cevallos, the Spanish minister of state, March 12, 1807, in which a letter from Wilkinson is mentioned as having been delivered to him by the general's aide-de-camp, Walter Burling. Mr. McCaleb does not seem to have found a copy of the original Wilkinson letter in the Mexican archives, and had therefore to rely upon the abstract of it given in the viceroy's communication, which he terms "the key which unlocks the cipher of Wilkinson's conduct in the month of November, 1806". In using this document Mr. McCaleb seems to have fallen into three slight errors that may need a word of correction. One of these is due to a mistranslation, one probably to a typographical error, and one to the fact that the author apparently did not have the full text of the letter. On page 169 the viceroy, writing of Wilkinson, is made to say: "He finally comes to what I had anticipated, the question of payment for his services. He asks for \$85,000 in one sum, and \$26,000 in another." The precise words of the viceroy are: ". . . finalmente viene á recaer en que disponga yo el pago de ochenta y cinco mil pesos por una parte, y treinta y seis mil por otra." A better translation of this sentence would be: "Ultimately he falls back upon my providing for the payment of \$85,000 for one part and \$36,000 for the other."

As to the first error, it will be noticed that, if the viceroy suspected from the outset the motives of Wilkinson, he does not say so. The word ultimately (*finalmente*), moreover, is used in conjunction with an earlier plea of that officer to the effect that he had risked his life, fame, and fortune to protect Mexico from the designs of Burr. And \$36,000, not \$26,000, is the second sum mentioned.

But the Spanish phrases "por una parte . . . por otra" can hardly be rendered "in one sum . . . in another". Nor is the translation above suggested comprehensible until the letter of Wilkinson itself is carefully read. Therein it appears that the phrases refer to the twofold service Wilkinson was to perform in behalf of the Spanish possessions, and for which he asked payment. The whole letter is of so much importance that it is worth while to print it in full. The English original was destroyed in compliance with Wilkinson's request in the letter itself. The Spanish translation of it is in the Archivo Historico-Nacional, Madrid, Papeles de Estado, Legajo 5564 B.

WILLIAM R. SHEPHERD.

JAMES WILKINSON TO JOSÉ DE ITURRIGARAY.

NATCHEZ, 17 de Noviembre de 1806.

Exmo. Sôr.

No ha mucho que V. E. pueda verme sobre las fronteras de la provincia de Texas sosteniendo las pretenciones y executando las ordenes del presidente de los Estados Unidos, y ahora estoy sin ordenes ó autoridad de mi gobierno, esforzando todo mi poder para sostener la buena fé de estos estados, oponiéndome á una tormenta que se forma de la parte del Este que amenaza el asiento sobre que V. E. está sentado, y si no se reprime á tiempo, trastornará los cimientos del imperio sobre el qual preside.

Ha sido con el objeto de resistir esta rebolesionaria tempestad que he transferido tan velocemente mis tropas desde el Rio de las Sabinas á la Nueva Orleans sin saber las disposiciones de los Estados Unidos, y he tomado y seguiré con iguales medidas sobre mi propia autoridad, como por mis medias privadas, que me pongan de estado de impedir el estruendo, si es posible, que amenaza la destrucción del reyno mexicano.

Esta infernal combinación se compone de Casadores del Kentucky y establecimientos del Ohio capitaneados por sujetos de capacidad y esperiencia y gefes distinguidos de la Revolución americana á quienes se les ha prometido una fuerza naval Británica disfrasada para cooperar con ellos.

La Nueva Orleans debe ser la primera victima de su rapacidad. Despues deberá hecharse sobre la Vera Cruz, y la conquista de la ciudad donde V. E. reside debe seguirse de donde el Evangelio de la revolución y revelión deberá propagarse hasta sus más remotas provincias y escenas de violencia como de pillage debe[n] seguirse. Para contrarrestar estas calamidades, de las quales la vista y el ánimo se apartan con horror, como un Leonidas me arrojaré en el paso, defendiéndolo ó pereciendo en la empresa: pero como la pequeñez de mis fuerzas contra una quadrilla de desesperados puede ocasionar el éxito del conflicto ni cierto, aconsejaría á V. E. que sin perder un momento de tiempo pusiera á la Vera Cruz en estado de rechazar un cuerpo de 129 hombres, y que asimismo tubiera el ojo alerta á los puntos principales de la costa, porque si los bandidos son rechazados de la Vera Cruz, pueden intentar un desembarco en otra parte: mediante á hallarse acompañados de ciertos emisarios desesperados de esas provincias que conocen bien las costas y animarán á los revolucionarios de perseverar en el seguro de una revolución general de los súbditos de V. E. á su favor.

Para los nombres y caracteres de los caudillos de esta audaz empresa y los pormenores de este infernal complotte ruego á V. E. confie en el dador W. Burling Esqr. (Escudero) el único sugeto que existe á quien yo pudiera fiar esta misión, y á quien he podido persuadir abandonara el descanso de su casa en una estación tan cruda para luchar con las fatigas y peligros de una larga caminata entre desiertos y bosques por mi personal influjo sobre él, y la solemne seguridad que le he dado que V. E. le remuneraría con liberalidad por los trabajos y riesgos á que se hallara expuesto.

Por lo que á mí toca arriesgo mi vida, mi fama y bienes por las medias que he adoptado : mi vida por la mutación que he hecho en las disposiciones militares sin el conocimiento de mi gobierno ; mi fama por ofrecer esta comunicación á una potencia extranjera sin ordenes, y mi fortuna ó bienes, agotando mi propio bolsillo y los de mis amigos para eludir, frustrar, y si fuese posible, destruir los planes nefarios de los rebolucionarios.

El elevado puesto de V. E. encierra un caracter sublime de honor, y bajo de este supuesto le he franqueado mi confianza para salvar ese país, en la plena persuasión que esta carta despues de traducida, testimoniada, y archivada en cifra se hará pedazos en la presencia del dador y que en la cuenta que V. E. diese á su corte de este asunto se omita que mi nombre sea conocido á los gobiernos Británnicos, Franceses, y Americanos.

Para desbaratar los planes y destruir el concierto y la armonía de los bandidos que en la actualidad se están formando en el Ohio, he destinado por medio de agentes idoneos la cantidad de ochenta y cinco mil pesos, y para el despacho ejecutivo de copias y contrarevolucionarios treinta y seis mil pesos que espero sean reintegrados al dador, por cuya seguridad á su regreso ruego á V. E. mande se le franquee una escolta correspondiente hasta las inmediaciones de Natchitoches ; y confiase firmemente en la equidad de V. E. en el caso que la providencia me conserve la vida y me ponga en estado de derrotar á los bandidos destinados contra Mexico, tendria la vondad de considerar justo y equitativo el reintegro de qualesquiera otras ganas que me vea precisado á hacer en sostener la causa comun de buen gobierno, orden y humanidad.

Eñmo. Sór. con profundo respeto tengo el honor de ser el más obediente y humilde, aunque inconocido, servidor de V. E —

(firmado) DIEGO WILKINSON.

Al Eñmo. Señor Virrey del Reyno de México y territorio anexo.

[Translation.]

NATCHEZ, November 17, 1806.

Most Excellent Sir :

Not long ago your Excellency might have seen me on the frontiers of the province of Texas upholding the claims and carrying into execution the orders of the president of the United States. Now without orders or authority from my government I am trying with all my might to keep good faith on the part of these states, while I face a storm gathering in the east which threatens the seat of government in which your Excellency is placed, and which, if not dispelled in time, will overthrow the foundations of the empire under your rule.

Although ignorant of what the United States might wish me to do, it was to withstand this revolutionary tempest that I recalled my troop so suddenly from the Sabine river to New Orleans. On my own responsibility and by my own private means I have taken and shall continue to take such measures as will enable me to check the commotion that threatens destruction to the realm of Mexico.

This infernal combination is composed of backwoodsmen from Kentucky and the settlements along the Ohio. It is led by able and experienced men and officers distinguished in the American Revolution, who have been secretly promised the coöperation of a British naval force.¹

New Orleans is to be the first victim of their rapacity. Afterward they are to attack Vera Cruz, and then will follow the conquest of the city in which your Excellency resides, from which point the gospel of revolution and rebellion is to be spread to the remotest provinces, and scenes of violence and pillage must ensue. In order to ward off these calamities, from which sight and mind recoil in horror, I will hurl myself like a Leonidas into the breach, defending it or perishing in the attempt. But, since the feebleness of my force when pitted against a band of desperados might make the issue of the conflict uncertain, I would advise your Excellency, without losing a moment's time, to place Vera Cruz in a condition to beat back a force of 129 men,² and also to keep a watchful eye on the chief ports along the coast; because, if the bandits should be repulsed from Vera Cruz, they might plan to disembark elsewhere. Accompanied, as they will be, by certain desperate emissaries from the Mexican provinces, who know the coasts well, they will encourage the revolutionists to persevere in the hope of a general uprising among your Excellency's subjects in their favor.

For the names and characters of the leaders of this bold undertaking, as well as for the details of this infernal plot, I beg your Excellency to trust the bearer, W. Burling, Esq., the only person living to whom I could confide this mission. Thanks to my personal influence, and the solemn assurance I have given him that your Excellency would reward him liberally for the labors and hazards to which he will be exposed, I have been able to persuade him to leave the quiet of his home in this inclement season of the year and struggle with the fatigue and perils of a long journey through desert and wilderness.

So far as I am concerned, I am risking my life, my good name, and my property by the means I have adopted: my life by the change I have made in the military arrangements without the knowledge of my government; my good name by offering without orders this communi-

¹ The Spanish government, of course, was already well informed on this point through the communications of Yrujo, the minister at Washington, based upon the supposed revelations of Burr's henchman, Jonathan Dayton. In his letter to Cevallos, December 5, 1805 (Archivo Historico-Nacional, Estado, Legajo 5541), he says, "The expedition on the part of England is to be composed of three ships of the line, and seven or eight smaller armed vessels which will bring arms, ammunition, and artillery." Yrujo adds, however, "He [Dayton] wanted to bamboozle me with the mysterious information . . . and, despairing of any advantage from his rôle as a conspirator, since England has not entered into his schemes, he has essayed to play the part of the faithful thief by revealing to me a secret that for many reasons it was rather to his interest not to divulge."

² Assuming that the text of the letter is correct, this number appears to have been Wilkinson's estimate of the number of men then (November, 1806) actually at the disposal of Burr. Ralston told Dr. Carmichael, January 11, 1807 (Wilkinson, *Memoirs*, II. Appendix LXXXV), that "the number of men at present with Colonel Burr, did not exceed one hundred and fifty", *i. e.*, at the time Burr reached New Madrid.

cation to a foreign power; and my fortune or possessions by draining my private purse and those of my friends in order to elude, frustrate, and, if possible, destroy the nefarious schemes of the revolutionists.

The exalted station of your Excellency bears with it a sublimely honorable character, and under this supposition I have given you my confidence as a means to save your country, in the full persuasion that, after this letter has been translated, attested, and placed in cipher in the archives, it will be destroyed in the presence of the bearer, and that in the report which your Excellency may make to your court on this matter, you will see that my name is not divulged to the British, French, and American governments.

Through the instrumentality of suitable agents I have arranged to expend the sum of 85,000 pesos in shattering the plans and destroying the union and harmony among the bandits now being enrolled along the Ohio, and 36,000 in the discretionary despatch of supplies and counter-revolutionists, which sums¹ I trust will be reimbursed to the bearer, for whose safe return I ask your Excellency to furnish a suitable escort as far as the immediate neighborhood of Natchitoches. I trust, also, that I may confide fully in your Excellency's sense of justice, so that in case Providence spares my life and enables me to rout the bandits destined against Mexico, you will regard as fair and equitable the reimbursement of whatever other outlays I may have to make in upholding the common cause of good government, order, and humanity.

I have the honor to be, most excellent sir, with profound respect,
your Excellency's most obedient and humble, although unknown servant,

(Signed) JAMES WILKINSON.

To his Excellency, the Viceroy of the kingdom of Mexico and territory annexed.

5. *A Letter of Admiral Farragut, 1853.*

AMONG the Draper Manuscripts in the library of the Wisconsin Historical Society there is a letter (press-mark, 6 xx 60) by David

¹ Whether or not these statements of Wilkinson are absolutely false, and the whole affair is accordingly a brazen swindle, must remain undetermined for the present. In the absence of better evidence, however, the affirmative view receives considerable support, first, from the well-known duplicity of Wilkinson in connection with the Burr conspiracy, and secondly, from the assertions in his *Memoirs*, II. 326-327, that he did not appreciate how serious the projects of Burr had become, and hence that he had not made elaborate preparations to forestall them, until November 6 (eleven days only before the above letter to the viceroy was written), when a letter of warning reached him from James L. Donaldson, of Natchez. He says: "notwithstanding the communications of Swartwout, my mind was not entirely satisfied, and I could not give full credit to his information. But this letter of Mr. Donaldson removed my doubts; and I lost not a moment, after the receipt of it, to put in operation all the means I commanded, for repelling the formidable force, which I now expected would soon be before New Orleans; to which capital my eyes were immediately directed." Again: "I had not formed a decided opinion, of the nature and objects of Burr's enterprise, before the receipt of Mr. Donaldson's letter. . . . I then first perceived, it was wholly unauthorised by the government: — highly criminal in the design, — most alarming in its extent. . . . I had no longer any difficulty, as to the course of conduct, my duty, and the interests of the nation, required me to pursue."